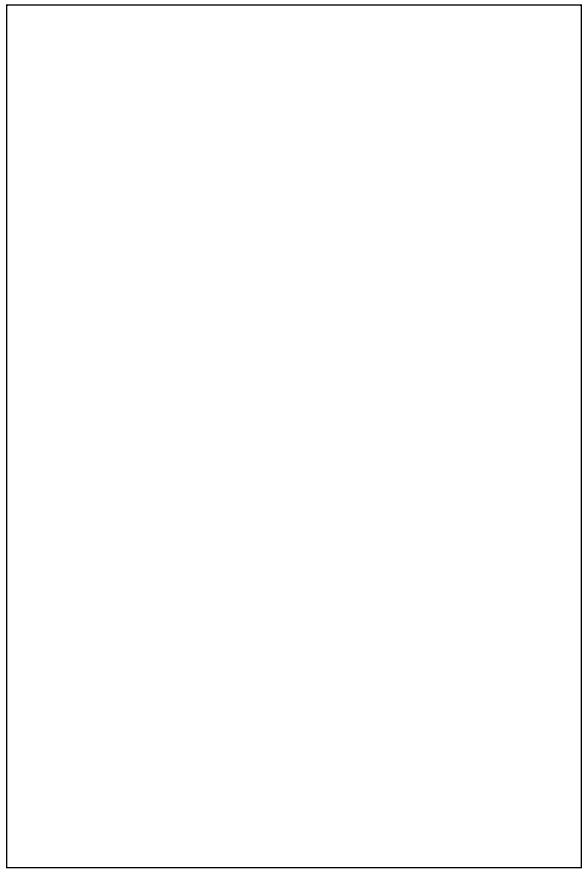
Remarks



Gen. Ronald R. Fogleman

Golden Legacy, Boundless Future

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The subject of this conference, the history of the United States Air Force from 1947 to 1997, fits appropriately with the overall theme of the Air Force's fiftieth anniversary-year celebration, Golden Legacy, Boundless Future. I would like to begin with some reflections on the "golden legacy," without trying to regurgitate the history of the Air Force.

For good or ill, many of us in the room have been labeled, and over the years I have become known as a historian. I think I am more aptly described as somebody who has a keen interest in history. So, when the Air Force History and Museums Program decided to mount a symposium dealing with the history of the United States Air Force, I was eager to participate. However, there are people out there, the unwise and the unbelievers, many in uniform, who actually question the utility of studying history. What is the source of the skepticism about the value of historical investigation, particularly of military history?

One of the first objections that one hears (a rather superficial argument) is that all military events are unique. Each occurs in a specific time and place and is unrepeatable. If one believes that every aspect of the past is unique, then none of what has gone on previously can or will be duplicated or reproduced. Therefore, why would we try to generalize from unique situations?

Another source of skepticism about the value of studying the past comes from the fact that we are living in a world of such rapid and accelerating social, economic, political, and technological change that there are no valid lessons to be garnered from military events that occurred long ago, or even not so long ago. There are those who would say, therefore, that not only is it unproductive to look to history, but to do so may even be harmful. They correctly point out that we may draw the wrong lessons, or that or we may focus so much on a past event that we keep relearning the same thing. That school of thought says we tend to refight the last war.

I appreciate hearing various perspectives on any subject, and I would agree that we should treat history, particularly of the institutions we love, with a certain amount of caution. In fact, the remarks of a senior Air Force leader

forced me to reflect on the relevance of my own war stories, my own version of the past. At an air power symposium held at Maxwell AFB many years ago, I was in the audience listening to Gen. Ted Milton, who had just retired. He was waxing eloquent about an event when suddenly he stopped and said, "I have discovered that the older I get, the easier it is for me to recall, with the greatest of clarity, events that never happened." We all must recognize that events, and certainly our own role in them, become colored in our memories, and that people will often assist us in our re-creations.

In spite of the pitfalls of proclaiming lessons learned, the study of history provides needed context and greater understanding of the processes of decision-making. As we consider the forces that came together to establish an independent United States Air Force fifty years ago, it is worth recalling that it was not a benevolent Congress that created the Air Force. The National Security Act of 1947 grew out of air power's demonstrated coming-of-age during World War II. The effectiveness of precision daylight bombing can be debated, but it is a fact that airmen were able to open a second front in the war in Europe that could not have been effected easily in any other fashion. We cannot argue with the fact that the Second World War came upon this nation from the air in a bold, strategic, surprise attack at Pearl Harbor. We cannot argue with the fact that the end of the war came about as a result of strategic attacks from the air when the United States Army Air Forces dropped two nuclear bombs on Japan. Just as the war started for America, it ended for America. I am convinced that the Congress of the United States established an independent Air Force because it recognized that air power had changed, fundamentally and forever, the nature of warfare. Knowing more about the evolution of warfare, in theory and action, gives us greater context and perspective on the decisions we make, the doctrine we espouse, and the missions we perform today.

Let us briefly review some of the earlier developments that changed the conduct of warfare. In 1953, one of my college professors, Dr. I.B. Holley, published a little book called *Ideas and Weapons* that dealt with the interrelationships between theory and technology. Dr. Holley reminded us that one inevitably influences the other. When we look back at the history of warfare and the implements used, we might consider the impact, for example, of the stirrup. Until the stirrup was invented, a man on a horse served as a means of transportation. But when you combine the man, the horse, and the stirrup, for the first time a thrusting weapon of shock and mass is created. Thereafter, we had the invention of the long bow, which effectively permitted a standoff between the man on foot and the man on horseback.

The invention of gunpowder as it was applied to sea warfare and to individual armament was a monumental breakthrough in weaponry. Its use led to advances in rifles and other arms during the nineteenth century. An instrumental change came with the passing from the age of sails to the age of steam

for naval forces. Clearly, the most significant event of the twentieth century was the advent of air power. Once again we had a fundamental alteration in the nature of warfare.

Because of the recognition of the role of air power in combat, Congress established the United States Air Force and gave us the responsibility of providing for this nation a full range of capabilities in the areas of science and technology, research and development, testing and evaluation, production, fielding, employment, and sustaining forces in the air and space arena. That is what we do for a living. Historians' documentation and interpretation of those roles and missions provide greater understanding and a means of evaluating the work of military professionals.

I am satisfied that historians have done a good job of describing the period of our history that preceded the independent Air Force, that is, through the interwar years and World War II. We have paid less attention to some of the noncombat and unglamorous administrative and organizational developments that followed the war. Many airmen, including some of the folks in this room, lived through the Cold War era and can probably offer insight into many aspects of that period. When I was engaged in the oral history program as an instructor at the Air Force Academy, I got fascinating little bursts of information that enriched my knowledge about the history of the Air Force. For example, I was interested to hear that at the end of World War II, as we returned to a peacetime air force and downsized, Gen. Hap Arnold removed himself from the process of choosing future Air Force leaders. He turned that decision over to a group of senior officers who were going to be part of the new cadre. Essentially, those officers held their own little selective early-retirement board.

Airmen had been through that process before, but they had not been the decision-makers. At the end of World War I, as troops returned from France, there were only two general officer billets in the Air Service—a two-star and a one-star billet. Undoubtedly, at least a couple of airmen, Billy Mitchell and Benny Foulois, could have competed for those billets. But General Pershing selected Charles T. Menoher to fill the two-star position as Chief of the Air Service. As best I can determine, Menoher's sole qualification was the fact that he had been a division commander during the war. Recognizing that they needed an airman, they selected Billy Mitchell as Menoher's deputy, leaving Benny Foulois out in the cold. As a result, when Foulois stepped aboard ship in France in 1919, he was a brigadier, but when he set foot at the bottom of the gangplank on arriving home, he was a major. The same failure to achieve postwar promotion in the ground army would occur again at the end of World War II. But for the first time, with an independent air force on the horizon, airmen would choose and be led by their own. It would be illuminating to learn more about how such key decisions have been made, and by whom, over the years.

I would also like to see greater historical investigation of noncombat activities and functions during the Cold War. We have made a good beginning

in tracing the development of ICBMs, but we would profit, for example, from more information regarding overhead reconnaissance in air and space. There are many critical aspects of ground and air support operations for which the history is incomplete. And, as I indicated, we could benefit by knowing more about decision-making and decision-makers.

These kinds of studies are invaluable as we look to the future. As two years ago we contemplated this fiftieth anniversary year, celebrating both our Golden Legacy and our Boundless Future, the senior leadership of the USAF inaugurated a long-range planning initiative. We reached a major milestone in October 1996 in Colorado Springs when we took up the question of the kind of air force this nation needed in the twenty-first century. That effort was motivated by two things. One was almost organizationally and structurally driven. In the spring of 1995, it appeared that little of significance would come from the Roles and Missions Commission. As often happens, commissions recommend another study or document, so when it became clear that a quadrennial defense review would be recommended, we began a serious discussion about the future of the Air Force.

The second element that fueled the effort to rethink the role of the Air Force in the future was more basic, the result of my own experience right after I became Chief. Previously I had been Commander of Transportation Command at Scott AFB, Illinois. Since I was actively engaged in operational matters, I had given only passing notice to more theoretical or futuristic issues. So, shortly after becoming Chief, I sent word to the Air Staff: "I want the smartest person on the Air Staff to explain information warfare to me." I should have seen that we were in trouble when two people showed up. Obviously we did not have everything in one kit bag. (Moreover, one of the people who showed up was an operator and one was an intelligence officer.) They subjected me to what I could best describe as dueling briefings, but they convinced me that they were, in fact, what I had asked for—the smartest persons on the subject. Not only did they educate me, but eventually we put together a presentation that we took on the road to help educate the commanders in chief.

In the process of informing myself, reading as much as I could, I began to grasp the import of the stunning advances in information technology. Fiber optics were about to be laid around the world; space-based communication was linked to ground-based systems. Those were merging with computer power that was doubling every eighteen months and getting cheaper every day. Also, avionics were becoming miniaturized in a way that would allow us to put together very capable, very complex sensor packages. Those technological advances, combined with the inherent characteristics of air power—range, speed, and flexibility—were adding new elements to the current and ongoing revolution in military affairs.

As we in the Air Force began long-range planning, in attempt to come to terms with new thinking and new technologies, our vision began to form. We

came to see that in the first quarter of the twenty-first century it will be possible from space and air-breathing platforms to locate, track, target, and if we choose, engage anything of consequence that is located on or travels across the face of the earth—in near real time. That is the key point, the great leap—in *near real time*. We can do all those things today, but not in near real time. By the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first century, by operating in near real time, we will fundamentally change the size and composition of surface forces and the nature of air power.

To get from here to there, we will be forced to reconsider the way we do business. There is great value in looking back to see how change has been dealt with in the past. It was the flexibility of airmen that contributed to their successes in World War II and throughout the Cold War. As an institution, the Air Force has a culture that willingly accepts change, although some constants must be kept in mind. First of all, we must support the national security strategy. We do not exist as an entity unto ourselves. Also, we must never lose sight of the fact that people are the instruments for action. I and all the Chiefs who follow me are charged by law with organizing, training, and equipping forces. We can gain insight about how those duties might be performed when we turn to past experience, not only of war but also that in peacetime, during the 1920s and 1930s, and through the Cold War. We can benefit from knowing how airmen identified new missions and formed alliances with other services, other nations, and elements of the aerospace industry to produce the kinds of machines, perhaps in relatively small numbers, that would be needed in great numbers later.

Looking back at our Golden Legacy, and looking forward to the Boundless Future, I find it invaluable to be a part of groups like this who come together to think and talk and exchange ideas about where we have been, what successes we have had, and what mistakes we have made. Great good can come from it, but only if we follow through by educating the public and those in uniform about the history of air power. We do that largely by publishing and distributing the work that we have already completed and by continuing our historical investigations into areas where our knowledge remains limited. With that, I will close by admitting that over time I have been called many things. I am honored today to be among friends who call me a historian.